DECLASSIFIED P.L. 14 VIET-5

INCOMING TELEGRAM *Department of State*

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Action
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Info

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VZCZCMJA796JIA711
PP RUEHC
DE RUMJIR 703/1 1911335
ZNY SSSSS
P R 101305Z JUL 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUHHHQA/CINCPAC
RUMTBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
RUMJFS/AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
STATE GRNC
BT
S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SAIGON 703

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1967 JUL 10 AM 10 06

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY Dana Dyeberg DATE 10/5/81
RDS ☐ or XDS ☐ EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED ☑ RELEASABLE ☑
RELEASE DENIED ☐
PA 703FOI EXEMPTIONS

LIMDIS

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

REF: A. SAIGON 26352, B. SAIGON 29076

SUB: VIEWS OF TRAN VAN HUONG ON ELECTION AND POLITICAL SITUATION

1. TRAN VAN HUONG RETURNED TO SAIGON AFTERNOON JULY 8. HE RECEIVED EMBOFF MORNING JULY 10 AND MADE FOLLOWING POINTS IN COURSE OF 90 MINUTE CONVERSATION:

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A. HUONG OPENED BY SAYING THAT HE IS A SIMPLE MAN WITHOUT MUCH TALENT, AND HE HAS BEEN HAVING GRAVE DOUBTS ABOUT HIS ABILITY TO DEAL WITH THE THORNY PROBLEMS THAT WILL FACE THE NEW PRESIDENT OF VIET-NAM. HE IS A CANDIDATE ONLY BECAUSE HIS FORMER STUDENTS AND MANY OTHER GROUPS HAVE ASKED HIM TO RUN. ONE THING HE CAN OFFER, HOWEVER, IS A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORDINARY VIETNAMESE PEOPLE. HE HAS ALWAYS LIVED WITH THE COMMON PEOPLE, HAS WORKED AS A COOLIE, HAS NEVER SOUGHT OR HAD WEALTH. AMERICANS IN GENERAL ONLY TALK WITH THE THIN UPPER LAYER OF EDUCATED VIETNAMESE AND SO NEVER REALLY UNDERSTAND THE SIMPLE AND EMOTIONAL PEOPLE THAT MAKE UP MOST OF THE POPULATION.

B. THE GREAT MASS OF ORDINARY VIETNAMESE PEOPLE WILL NOT SUPPORT A LEADER BECUASE OF HIS PLANS OR HIS SPEECHES. THEY WILL NOT FOLLOW AND BELIEVE IN HIM EVEN IF HE GIVES THEM MATERIAL THINGS. THEIR REACTION IS SIMPLE AND EMOTIONAL. SOME LEADERS THEY TRUST, OTHERS THEY DO NOT. HUONG HAS NO MONEY AND IS MAKING NO PRO-

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MISES, BUT HE THINKS THAT THE ORDINARY PEOPLE TRUST HIM. THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE DO NOT WANT DEMOCRACY. THEY ARE NOT READY FOR IT; THEY WILL RESPOND TO FORM AND HONEST LEADERSHIP, HOWEVER.
C. ASKED IF HE BELIEVES THAT HE WILL WIN, HUONG LAUGHED AND SAID ANY CANDIDATE MUST HAVE HOPE OR HE WILL NOT RUN. HE THEN MENTIONED THE UNFAIR AND ILLEGAL PRESSURES AND TACTICS WHICH KY HAD EMPLOYED EARLIER. WHEN EMBOFF ASKED IF HIS CAMPAIGN WORKERS ARE STILL ENCOUNTERING SUCH TACTICS AS THOSE DESCRIBED BY VO LONG TRIEU IN REFERENCE B, HUONG SAID THAT KY'S PRESSURES AND UNFAIR TACTICS HAVE BEEN GREATLY REDUCED IN RECENT WEEKS, BUT THEY DO CONTINUE. HE GAVE NO SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.
D. COMMENTING ON BIG MINH'S CANDIDACY, HUONG SAID THAT AT THEIR FIRST MEETING IN 1963 MINH HAD CALLED HIM "TEACHER" (THEY). THIS WAS A SIGN OF GREAT RESPECT, AND IT CAME AT A TIME WHEN HE HAD NO POSITION OR FAME. FORM THIS FIRST MEETING GREW A DEEP MUTUAL RESPECT. HUONG DESCRIBED WITH SOME EMOTION HIS FINAL MEETING

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WITH MINH IN NOVEMBER 1964 JUST BEFORE PHAN KHAC SUU BECAME CHIEF OF STATE. AT THAT MEETING MINH SAID THAT HE WAS MAKING A SACRIFICE AND THAT IT WAS UP TO HUONG TO ALSO MAKE ANY NECESSARY SACRIFICES FOR THE NATION. HUONG CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT MINH IS A FINE MAN, BUT HE IS NOT A GOOD POLITICIAN. MINH TRIES TO MAKE EVERY-ONE HAPPY AND ENDS UP DISPLEASING EVERYONE. AS A MILITARY MAN, HE HAS GREAT TALENT, BUT HE SHOULD STAY OUT OF POLITICS.
E. HUONG SAID THAT HIS COMMENTS ON MINH AS A POLITICIAN DID NOT MEAN HE THINKS MINH SHOULD BE BARRED FROM RUNNING FOR PRESIDENT. HE OBSERVED THAT THE REFUSAL TO LET MINH RETURN TO VIET NAM IS AN EXAMPLE OF THE DIFFICULTIES THAT ARISE WHEN SOME MEN PLACE THEMSELVES ABOVE THE LAW. IT IS CLEAR THAT LEGALLY MINH HAS EVERY RIGHT TO RETURN AND RUN FOR PRESIDENT. HE HAS COMMITTED NO CRIME, AFTER ALL. ASKED IF HE BELIEVES THAT MINH WILL IN FACT BE ALLOWED TO RUN, HUONG SAID THAT THIS DEPENDS ON THE CURRENT "STRUGGLE" BETWEEN THE ASSEMBLY AND THE MILITARY. IF THE ASSEMBLY WINS, THEN MINH WILL BE ALLOWED TO RUN.

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ASKED IF HE THINKS THAT MINH'S CANDIDACY IS NOT A THREAT TO NATIONAL SECURITY AS ALLEGED IN THE GENERALS' COMPLAINT, HUONG SAID ONLY THAT NATIONAL SECURITY IS A VERY ELASTIC TERM. EMBOFF SAID THATT FROM THIS HE ASSUMED HUONG BELIEVES MINH SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO RETURN AND RUN FOR THE PRESIDENCY. HUONG NODDED YES. ASKED IF HE THINKS MINH WOULD HAVE A GOOD CHANCE OF WINNING THE ELECTION, HUONG SAID THAT HE THINKS MINH CANNOT WIN. HUONG APPEARED TO HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMPLAINT AGAINST MINH'S RUNNING MATE, NGUYEN NGOC LIENG.
F. HUONG THINKS THAT THE THIEU-KY SLATE IS CONSIDERABLY WEAKER THAN THE PREVIOUS KY-LOC TICKET. HE BELIEVES THAT THE RIVALRY BETWEEN KY AND THIEU CONTINUES BELOW THE SURFACE, AND KY WILL NOT WHOLE-HEARTEDLY SUPPORT THE THIEU CAMPAIGN. HE COMMENTED THAT KY PROBABLY CANNOT HAND OVER TO THIEU THE ELECTORAL MACHINE THAT HE CREATED FOR HIMSELF EVEN IF HE WANTS TO. KY BOUGHT THE HOA HAO AND THE CAO DAI, AND HE TRIED TO BUY THE CATHOLICS, BUT THESE GROUPS ARE NOT LIKELY TO CONSIDER THAT THEY NOW OWE THE DEBT TO THIEU. HUONG ALSO SPECU-

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LATED THAT KY IS NOT THE KIND OF MAN WHO WOULD EVER REALLY SETTLE FOR SECOND PLACE. THUS IT IS LIKELY THAT KY IS IN FACT GOING TO SUPPORT ONE OF THE CIVILIAN TICKETS IN THE HOPE OF BEING NAMED PRIME MINISTER. HUONG HAS HEARD THAT KY WILL EVENTUALLY BACK PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE NGUYEN DINH LUYEN. HUONG IDENTIFIED LUYEN AS THE FATHER-IN-LAW OF POLICE GENERAL LOAN. WHEN EMBOFF COMMENTED THAT LUYEN SEEMS TO HAVE LITTLE SUPPORT AND IS NOT LIKELY TO WIN, HUONG MERELY AGREED.

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RT

NOTE: ADVANCE DELIVERY TO S/S-O AT 11:01 A.M.
PASSED: WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA, USIA, NSA 11:01 A.M.

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PP RUEHC
DE RUMJIR 703/2 1911415
ZNY SSSSS
P R 101345Z JUL 67
FM AMEMBASSY SAIGON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO RUHHHQA/CINCPAC
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G. HUONG THEN RAISED THE MATTER OF THE CANDIDACY OF AU TRUONG THANH AND SAID FLATLY THAT HE BELIEVES THANH IS WORKING FOR THE VIET CONG. HE SAID THAT HE KNOWS THE FATHER OF THANH'S WIFE VERY WELL FROM THE PERIOD IN 1945 WHEN BOTH WERE MEMBERS FOR THE THEN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY IN HANOI. THANH HAS CONNECTIONS WITH THE COMMUNISTS THROUGH HIS WIFE. THANH SEEMED TO BE DOING THE RIGHT THINGS FOR THE ECONOMY WHEN HE WAS MINISTER, BUT AS SOON AS HE RESIGNED THE ECONOMY BECAME MUCH WEAKER. THIS WAS THANH'S PLAN. HUONG NEVER TRUSTED THANH AND WARNED HIS SUPPORTERS EARLIER AGAINST

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TRUSTING THANH. WHEN HUONG REFUSED TO PROMISE THANH THAT IF HE WON THE ELECTION HE WOULD NAME THANH AS PRIME MINISTER, THANH FILED HIS OWN CANDIDACY. THANH WANTS TO HURT HUONG AND DISRUPT THE ELECTION.
H. ASKED ABOUT THE REPORTS THAT DURING THE CAMPAIGN HE WILL PROPOSE OPENING DIRECT TALKS WITH THE NLF, HUONG SAID THAT THE FRONT IS MERELY A CREATURE OF HO CHI MINH. HE WOULD NOT MORE TALK WITH THEM THAN HE WOULD TALK WITH EMBOFF'S COOK WHEN HE WANTED TO DISCUSS SOMETHING WITH EMBOFF. HE KNOWS THE PRINCIPAL FRONT LEADERS QUITE WELL; THE FRONT'S NUMBER TWO, HUYNH TAN PHAT, IN FACT WAS ONE OF HIS STUDENTS. THEY ARE ALL PAWNS OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT, WITH NO INDEPENDENCE AND NO AUTHORITY. WHEN NEGOTIATIONS ARE OPENED, THE ALLIES MUST TALK WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF NORTH VIET NAM. ASKED WHAT MEANS HE SEES FOR ACHIEVING PEACE, HUONG SAID THAT WE [illegible] PROPOSE PEACE TALKS WITH-

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OUT CONDITIONS, BASED ON THE REALIZATION THAT BOTH SIDES ARE SUFFERING FROM THE WAR AND THAT NORTH VIET NAM IS SUFFERING EVEN MORE THAN THE SOUTH, WHEN EMBOFF COMMENTED THAT THIS IS ESSENTIALLY THE AMERICAN

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POSITION, HUONG SAID YES, THAT HE AGREES WITH THE AMERICAN POSITION.
I. HUONG THEN OBSERVED THAT ONE THING IS CLEAR ABOUT OPENING NEGOTIATIONS: THE NORTH VIETNAMESE WILL NEVER TALK WITH KY. HE SAID THAT HO CHI MINH VIEWS KY AS A CHILD. MOREOVER, KY AS A NORTHERNER CANNOT PRETEND TO REPRESENT THE PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIET NAM.
J. HUONG WENT ON TO SAY THAT WE MUST NOT IMAGINE THAT WE CAN ACHIEVE PEACE BY PURELY MILITARY MEANS. THE COMMUNISTS NOW SEE THAT THE SOCIETY OF SOUTH VIET NAM IS COMPLETELY ROTTEN. THEY ARE WAITING FOR SOUTH VIET NAM TO DROP INTO THEIR HANDS LIKE A ROTTEN FRUIT DROPS FROM THE TREE. TO MAKE AN ACCEPTABLE PEACE REQUIRES THE PRIOR REFORM OF VIETNAMESE SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT.
K. HUONG WAS VAGUE ABOUT HIS CAMPAIGN PLANS. HE SAID HE HAS NOT MADE UP HIS MIND IF HE WILL TRAVEL INTO THE PROVINCES OR NOT.
L. HUONG REPEATED SEVERAL TIMES THAT HE IS NOT SEEKING US SUPPORT IN THE ELECTION.

2. HUONG DID NOT SAY ANYTHING ABOUT POST-ELECTION COOPERATION WITH THE OTHER MAJOR CANDIDATES DURING

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CONVERSATION WITH EMBOFF, THOUGH EMBOFF RAISED THE POINT. HOWEVER, IN CONVERSATIONS A FEW HOURS LATER AT A LUNCHEON WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND THE UNDER SECRETARY, HUONG AGREED WITH THE NECESSITY FOR SUCH COOPERATION. HE ALSO STATED FIRMLY AT LUNCHEON THAT IVILIAN-MILITARY COOPERATION IS ESSENTIAL IN THE .'TURE. HE TOUCHED ON SOME OF THE FOREGOING POINTS AS WELL.

3. HUONG IS STAYING IN A VERY MODEST AND SPARSELY FURNISHED APARTMENT NEAR THE CENTER OF TOWN. HE

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APPEARS TO BE IN ABOUT THE SAME STATE OF HEALTH AS DURING PREVIOUS VISITS WITH EMBOFF, THOUGH HE MAY HAVE GAINED SOME WEIGHT. HE COMMENTED AT ONE POINT THAT HE FEELS STRONG, AND COMPARED WITH SUCH LEADERS AS ADENAUER, HE IS A VERY YOUNG MAN.

4. HUONG SHOWED CONSIDERABLE EMOTION SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE DISCUSSION, HE HAD TEARS IN HIS EYES AT LEAST TWICE WHEN DISCUSSING THE SUFFERING OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE. IN SAYING AT ONE POINT THAT IT DOES NOT MATTER

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IF HE WINS OR LOSES, ONLY THAT THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE HAVE THE LEADERSHIP THEY NEED, HE WAS OBLIGED TO BREAK OFF FOR A MOMENT TO GET HIS EMOTIONS UNDER CONTROL.

5. COMMENT: A. ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT CONFIRM VO LONG TRIEU'S CLAIM THAT BIG MINH HAS AGREED TO THROW HIS SUPPORT TO HUONG, HUONG'S REMARKS WERE NOT INCONSISTENT WITH SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT. IT WOULD ALSO BE IN LINE WITH TRIEU'S STATEMENT TO EMBOFF OF SEVERAL WEEKS EARLIER, TO THE EFFECT THAT HUONG WOULD USE MINH IN HIS GOVERNMENT TO BALANCE OFF AND CONTROL THE OTHER MILITARY LEADERS SUCH AS KY AND THIEU. WE REMAIN SKEPTICAL, HOWEVER, THAT MINH HAS MADE ANY FIRM COMMITMENT TO BACK HUONG.
B. HUONG IN SEVERAL WAYS GAVE EMBOFF THE IMPRESSION THAT HE IS QUITE ANXIOUS TO SAY WHAT HE THINKS WE WANT TO HEAR. THIS SEEMED PARTICULARLY TRUE IN THE CASE OF HIS REMARKS ON NEGOTIATIONS AND AU TRUONG THANH. HE DENIED SEEKING AMERICAN SUPPORT WITH SO MUCH FERVOR THAT EMBOFF BELIEVES HE MAY THINK THE US WILL ACTIVELY TRY TO PROMOTE OR BLOCK HIS CANDIDACY. HE ALSO MADE A GREAT POINT OF THE IMPORTANCE HE PLACES ON UNDERSTANDING

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BETWEEN THE EMBASSY AND HIMSELF, TOLD EMBOFF THAT HE NOW KNOWS AND TRUSTS HIM COMPLETELY. EMBOFF ASSURED HUONG THAT THE US IS SUPPORTING NO CANDIDATE, ONLY FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS.
C. HUONG'S COMMENTS ON WINNING THE PEACE BY

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REFORMING VIETNAMESE SOCIETY AND GOVERNMENT ARE IN LINE WITH A DRAFT CAMPAIGN PLATFORM WHICH VO LONG TRIEU GAVE EMBOFF. (THIS DRAFT PLATFORM WHICH IS BEING TRANSLATED. WE WILL REPORT A SUMMARY OF IT BY SEPTEL.) THE PLATFORM IS TITLED "BUILDING PEACE ON FREEDOM, PROSPERITY, AND JUSTICE".

D. WE HAVE THE IMPRESSION FROM HUONG'S REMARKS AND OTHER REPORTS THAT KY'S PREVIOUS UNFAIR CAMPAIGN MANEUVERS AND PRESSURES HAVE VIRTUALLY STOPPED AND THAT HUONG AND THE OTHER CANDIDATES EVIDENTLY DO NOT AT THIS TIME FEEL THEMSELVES AT SUCH A GREAT DISADVANTAGE BECAUSE OF THIEU AND KY'S POSITION IN THE GOVERNMENT. HUONG DID COMMENT HOWEVER THAT THIEU AND KY SHOULD RESIGN IN ORDER TO COMPLY WITH THE ELECTORAL LAW.

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RT

PASSED SS/O 7/10/67 12:13 PM

PASSED WHITE HOUSE, DOD, CIA, USIA, NSA 7/10/67 1:55 PM

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